

The Benefits of Early Head Start

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Introduction

Early childhood education serves many benefits for many children. Children with disabilities and those who come from low-income areas are shown to excel in the opportunity that they have when attending early head start programs. Early head start programs are federally funded so that children younger than 3 can begin their education at a younger age so that they will be better prepared for when they come of school-age. In addition, Early head start programs are also put in place to educate pregnant women how to provide support to their developing child including being able to care for themselves. It is beneficial that children with disabilities have this opportunity to participate in early education, especially beginning physical therapy, occupational therapy, to help enhance their social, emotional, and physical needs at an early age. Children who live in poverty are at a greater disadvantage when it comes to education and it's important that they have those opportunities to learn at an early age just as any other child would. "Programs assist families in meeting their own personal goals and achieving self-sufficiency across a wide variety of domains, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security. Early Head Start programs also mobilize the local community to provide the resources and environment necessary to ensure a comprehensive, integrated array of services and support for children and families." (About the Early Head Start Program, 2020). Early head start programs provide support and services to families that need it. For example: food insecurities are addressed, screenings such as behavioral, developmental, hearing, vision, nutrition, and dental are conducted in order to tailor services to meet children and their family's individual and unique needs. These compassionate programs are based on evidence-based practices that acknowledge and celebrate the parent as the child's first teacher are available and accessible to

eligible families. The compassion that these programs have to help children develop and grow really shows when seeing the progress that the child has made from the start of their journey to when they graduate and move onto elementary school.

Early Childcare

“ECE programs are defined as programs designed to improve the cognitive or social development of 3- and 4-year-old children prior to kindergarten enrollment. Programs must include an educational component that addresses 1 or more of these learning objectives: literacy, numeracy, cognitive development, socioemotional development, and motor skills.” (Judith, 2020). Early Childcare programs are shown to benefit younger children in many ways. Children who participate in early childcare are shown to excel in many areas that a child who didn’t participate in childcare at an early age. “By improving educational outcomes for low-income and racial and ethnic minority children, these programs can promote long-term educational and health outcomes and increase health equity in countries with high-income economies, such as the United States.” (Judith, 2020). Early childcare opportunities allow the child to excel in areas that they may not have been exposed to if they didn’t participate in programs at any earlier age. Lower-income children are shown to have a harder time exceling in school due to the lack of resources that they may have to education which is why early childcare programs are beneficial for children in lower income families. Children who live-in low-income areas, tend to experience delays due to the lack of education that they may have at an early age. An experiment was put in place to see how early childhood education benefits children as they’re developing. Early childhood education is shown to benefit those children who are coming from low-income homes as these programs are put in place so that these children have access to education at an early age. “EHS programs are designed to nurture healthy attachments between parent and child (and child

and caregiver). Services encompass the full range of a family's needs from pregnancy through a child's third birthday.” (About early head start programs, 2020). Early head start programs also involve parents in their child’s development throughout all developmental domains, including cognitive, social, emotional, communication, and physical. Parents and teachers will work together to develop a plan specifically for that child so that they can work on the developmental and social areas that need improvement. Fifty-seven percent of head start programs require a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education for the head teachers in the classroom. (Hahn, 2016). However, all Early head start educators must have formal pedagogy focused primarily on the ages of birth to age three. This includes but is not limited to course work in brain development, attachment, and development theory as well as how to create a safe learning environment that allows for optimal conditions to thrive. These teachers are educated and have specialized in the specific areas that encompass head start programs which is something that would only benefit the children. In the classrooms that integrate both children with disabilities as well will require the head teacher to have a degree in special education so that the children placed in a classroom with a teacher that will understand their specific needs and behaviors. These classrooms may follow a push in model or an integrated modes; however, educators will be well versed in identifying the unique needs of individual children as well as in screening processes that would detect concern in the areas of development. In addition, a study was conducted on children’s outcomes of attending head start programs. This study was both observed in children who have just finished the program as well as in children who have completed the program but who are now adolescents. The study observed children who were attending programs under a specific criteria. This criteria included programs for children ages three or four, for low-income and minority families, and that are all year round. Studies have

shown that early childcare programs displayed a significant positive effect on children who attend early head start programs and them graduating from high school. In addition, head start programs have also displayed significant beneficial effects when looking at standardized achievement tests. (Hahn, 2016). This shows how early childhood and early head start programs are truly beneficial to the developing child starting from birth to 4 years old and sets the child up for success later in life as well.

Children in poverty and early childcare

Low-income families benefit from early childhood programs. Children who come from lower income families do not have the same access to the resources that children who come from middle class and higher-class families have. Low-income families are at a great disadvantage when it comes to educating their children, but early childhood programs, such as early head start programs, are put in place for children that come from low-income homes to help them develop, learn, and experience schooling at a young age so that they are prepared for school when they come of age. There are many benefits of early childhood education as these programs are set in place so that families from many different economic backgrounds could have access to them. In addition, there are many improvements that are being made so that families in low-income homes have more opportunities when it comes to early childhood education programs. Children who are placed in foster care who attend early head start programs tend to have a better time adjusting to social environments, have better cognitive outcomes, as well as overall better health. (Lee, 2020). This displays how early head start programs have a positive impact on many children and help them through their development, especially for children who are growing up in foster care and who live-in low-income areas. It is important for a developing child to have a safe place, feel wanted, and learn through different interactions. Children who are placed in foster

care at such a young age may have a harder time adjusting to new areas, which is why these early childcare programs are put in place so that they will have that safe place and something that remains consistent to them. Consistency is something that everyone needs to have at one point or another and school is sometimes that place for a child. “For children who have directly experienced trauma early in life, ECE environments can provide safety and stability (Bartlett, Smith, & Bringewatt, 2017; Paschall & Mastergeorge, 2016). Traumas that young children face could have severe and early impacts on child development, due to the intense fear experienced or threat posed to the child’s well-being (Lieberman, Chu, Van Horn, & Harris, 2011). Therefore, ECE programs and providers are in a unique position to offer benefits to children experiencing trauma through (a) screening and detecting, (b) offering nurturing environments to offset or buffer from instability or ancillary effect due to the trauma, such as loss of a caregiver or witnessing domestic violence, and (c) supporting the family of the child who has experienced a trauma (Bartlett, et al., 2017), especially by connecting families to health or mental health resources.” (Smith, 2020). Some children unfortunately have had experienced trauma and loss at a young age and don’t have a safe place to go. Early child education could be that safe place and could provide the children with the resources that they need so that they can understand what they have experienced and that they can talk about it. Teachers and anyone who works at an early head start program are to be mandated reporters as well. When an infant is being changed in this programs and a teacher may see a mark, burn, or anything that may be suspicious, must be reported immediately so that you can maintain the safety of the child. Children under the age of 1 are more susceptible to abuse or neglect which is important to know when working in this programs with the susceptible population. Unfortunately, child services has needed to be called in many cases within these programs as the child went to school with fractures, various bruises,

or burns on them. These programs are also put in place to maintain the safety of the children and anyone else from their family that may be in danger. Some children unfortunately bounce from shelter to shelter but attend early head-start programs which is the one source of consistency within their life which is something that is important to have at the age of development. Having a routine or some consistency is something that is important for a developing child to have in their life as consistency and routine enables the child to remember, learn, and master new things. ECE programs are there to benefit children that come from many different backgrounds and environments and allow them to feel some stability in their lives and within their families as they help families with as many needs as they can tend to.

The model of Early Head Start programs is to support families in compassionate responsive ways that celebrates and embraces the parent as the child's first educator and respects the role of the parent enormously. It is a partnership and goals are not only for the child but for all members of the household. Each enrolled family is assigned a trained family worker who supports individual family partnerships that encompasses shared decision making, hopes, dreams, needs, and access. In addition, the Early Head Start program supports early intervention in that the sooner services are in place the better. It takes a holistic approach as supports screenings in the areas of dental, physical, nutrition, hearing, vision, cognitive, and emotional wellness. This will lead to comprehensive services that addresses the well-being of the whole child.

Children with disabilities and early childcare

It is important for children with developmental disabilities to start schooling and interactions at a young age to promote their growth and development and to help with the obstacles that they may encounter when attending school. (Chen, 2019). But this has to start

somewhere and that comes from the child's parents being educated and understanding the importance of getting their child screened or knowing the signs that may be apparent to a child who may have a developmental disability. If these children are not screened properly, then they will not receive the specific services that they may need to grow. Parents may perceive the screening process for their child that have developmental concerns in many different ways. This displays that most parents found the screening process in these early head start programs is essential for their child so that they can begin the services that they need early on. In addition, these screenings help the parent understand the needs of their children and how to prepare them for school. A survey was conducted to see how well parents were educated on children with disabilities, such as knowing the signs of a child that may have a disability. This survey targeted different racial backgrounds and different economic status', such as families in low-income homes. It is important that parents are able to point out the specific signs that may show that their child may have a developmental delay, so that the child could receive that adequate services that they need. When children get screened for a disability, although the child is being observed, the parent is being asked questions as well which is why it is important to become familiar with developmental disabilities. In addition, social interaction is essential to the developing child, which needs to start from somewhere. It is these early childhood educational programs where these social connections will begin to form. In a child with a disability, it may be more difficult for them to create connections with their peers which is why it is important that these children begin early. In addition, this study showed the different interactions these children had on these peers and compared it to whether or not they have a disability. This study will show how essential it is that early childhood educational programs benefit children with disabilities both cognitively and socially too. When discussing about different services that are available for

children who live in low-income areas and have a disability, options are unfortunately very limited. It is important to give children who are in poverty with disabilities the adequate health care and therapies that the child needs so that they can progress accordingly. This study states how children who are in poverty with disabilities are limited to and are at a disadvantage when it comes to their child's health needs. This is why these children especially need to have access to the services that their child needs. Children who live in substandard housing may also have an increased susceptibility to health issues such as asthma or even lead poisoning, or inaccessibility to food sources other than fast food, which could lead to obesity. Sometimes these health conditions lead to emergency room visits as insurance may be an issue as well. Access to programs that support ameliorating and/or treating comorbid conditions to disabilities is important support the child's ability to thrive. "Head Start, the federally funded preschool program for low-income families, may serve an important role in providing and coordinating a variety of services for children and families with multiple needs, including nutrition, family social services, and physical, oral and mental health. Head Start programs are required to complete a number of health and developmental screenings for all children within 45 days of enrollment, and also are required to serve children with special needs, who must make up at least 10% of enrolled children." (Bergin, 2011). This conveys how early head start programs are there to only benefit and help for families who are in need and want to provide their children with the services and education that they need at young age. Early head start programs are programmed to provide those families with the help that they may need whether it's with food, medical services, and even with oral services as well. "These study findings point to a need to improve the quality of information given to language and ethnic minority families. One strategy could involve offering culturally-specific information about child development and DDs in multiple languages,

at a low reading level, and/or in non-print form. Encouraging developmental monitoring (e.g., milestones) and promotion (e.g., reading, singing) in racial/ethnic minority communities may also engender greater understanding of typical developmental trajectories and of deviation from these norms. Parents need to know that their early developmental concerns are important and can be a strong indicator of their child's developmental status." (Zuckerman, 2018). This survey conducted showed how minority families with different ethnic backgrounds and language barriers have less knowledge about the signs of developmental disabilities and how to distinguish if their child may have one. This is something that needs to change as these families need to have more knowledge about how to detect if their child may have a disability so that they can receive the proper services that they need. Information that these families need to be educated on should be available in different languages as well as have provided pamphlets so that they read about it. Monitoring their child is also something that was discussed because as children begin to grow and develop more apparent delayed on development may be seen which is something that should be documented. If children aren't screened because their parents aren't educated then the children would be put at a great disadvantage when it comes to their education and services that may be provided to them. Children whose parents express concerns but who do not have diagnosed disorders nonetheless score significantly lower on measures of intelligence, behavior and school achievement, so may be more likely ultimately to have difficulties in school. (Bergin, 2011). It is important that children whose parents have concerns about their development get screened so that they don't fall behind in school and so that they understand what they need in order for them to excel in things that they may struggle in. In all, children with disabilities benefit from attending early head start programs as these programs have teachers who are

specialized in special education, as well as additional care workers that are there to help attend to the child specific needs to enhance their development.

Conclusion

Education must start somewhere which often starts from the time an infant is born and continues for the rest of their life. Structured education is something that every child is granted but when they start isn't something that every family has a choice to have based on economic barriers. Children who come from low-income families often don't have the same opportunities and education options than children who come from other privileged backgrounds. Children who begin their education at an earlier age are shown to have significant improvements in cognitive, physical, and social aspects in their life. This is where early head start programs come into play. Early head start programs not only provide early childhood education to families from minority group, but they also provide education to pregnant women on milestones that their child should be hitting and support that they may need. Head start programs also provide families with the support that they may need to that they can attend to their child's needs. This includes weekly food supplies, dental checks, and physical checks for both the child and their family. These children are also provided with the education that is structured which is something that is important to begin at an early age as they will begin to remember and improve on specific tasks and activities that they should be able to do at their developmental age.

As a child is developing there are specific milestones that they should be hitting give or take a few months. For example, an infant who is 9 months old should be able to crawl and begin to pull themselves up with the help from someone or an object. It's important to recognize when there is a delay in these milestones which is something that a parent should made aware of. There are also social cues that should deem concerning to a parent, such as if the child isn't as interact

with other children their age and like to play alone, especially at the age of 3 or 4 when play with other children is something that children of this age category should be eager to do. These delays and social differences in children could indicate that a child may have a developmental disabilities. It is important that parents are educated about these specific signs that may indicate that their child may have a developmental delay so that they can get their child the specific services that they may need. In order to diagnosis a child with a developmental disability, the child must be screened. When a child attends an early head start program, any child that displays any of these signs that the child may need additional services, the program will screen the child. It is necessary that the parents are educated about these screenings to so that they understand that it is put in place to only help their child to succeed and not to point out their downfalls. Parents are also involved with the screening process to state the specific behaviors that they may observe their child doing which could be hard on the parent. These early head start programs are these to provide support to the family and the child as well to educate the parent so that they can understand their child's diagnosis and to help them accept it. Once the child is screened then these early head start programs will provide the child with the specific services that are needed for the child. Services that are included would be physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. These early head start programs are very beneficial to children with disabilities as these children will be granted serviced that they may not have had access to if they didn't attend these programs.

There are many early head start programs offered in New York City that are offered to families that meet the criteria as stated throughout. The pandemic hit a lot of families hard and made it difficult for many to buy the adequate amount of food and provide to other needs. When the pandemic hit, it was these compassionate programs that offered food to families that could

not afford food at the time. Head start programs also provided formula and diapers to families of infants. There were multiple people that would work together to put together bags of fruits, vegetables, and frozen foods for families in need. In addition, during the pandemic these programs were open for an “emergency childcare” which truly shows the dedication that these programs have to serve children and their families and to provided support to those in need. The emergency childcare would be a 12-hour day that was filled with education, support, and social interactions which is something that many children were robbed of during this time. Early head start programs are one of a kind and is filled with teachers, assistant teachers, cooks, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, directors, and nurses who are all compassionate to teach these children not only about the usual developmental activities, but how to be good people as well.

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